



MEMORANDUM

October 6, 2009

TO: Planning Commission

THROUGH: David B. Levy, Chief of Long Range Planning and Redevelopment

FROM: Ann Wallas, Planner III, Long Range Planning

**SUBJECT: Montgomery County 2009 - 2011 Growth Policy:
Follow up to presentation by Montgomery County Director of
Planning, MNCPPC on September 23, 2009**

The purpose of this memorandum is to follow up on the presentation given by Mr. Rollin Stanley to the Planning Commission on September 23 on the topic of Montgomery County's Draft 2009 – 2011 Growth Policy, and to outline the next steps that the Commission might take at their meeting on October 14, 2009. In the September 23 meeting, some Commissioners indicated their desire for the City to provide comments to the Montgomery County Council on this topic, and that the Planning Commission could provide a recommendation to the Mayor and Council in that regard. This memorandum provides a brief discussion of the Draft 2009-2011 Growth Policy and includes an attached draft letter for discussion.

Background

The Montgomery County Council adopts a new Growth Policy every other year – on odd-numbered years – after considering recommendations put forward by the Planning Board. The Growth Policy “sets the rules the Planning Board will use to consider subdivisions over the following two-year period, in the context of the [County's] Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO). The APFO ensures that there is enough school and road capacity to accommodate new development.” (p. 5 of the Draft Growth Policy). The Planning Board approved the 2009-2011 Growth Policy on July 30, 2009, and referred it to the Montgomery County Council for review. A Public Hearing was held on September 22, and the County Council's Planning Housing and Economic Development (PHED) Committee are scheduled to discuss the Policy on October 6, 13, 19 and 20.

The 2009-2011 Growth Policy

For the 2009 – 2011 Growth Policy, the County Planning staff and the Planning Board have presented a proposal that establishes a set of Smart Growth Criteria in the areas of schools and transportation, with the goal of encouraging compact mixed-use projects near transit. The proposal places a greater emphasis on environmental management, community design and connectivity, with the intention of modifying the operational mechanisms of the Growth Policy and APFO that the Planning Board believes to be leading, unintentionally, to sprawling development.

City of Rockville Issues

The City generally supports a focus on infill development and is implementing similar policies in our recently adopted Zoning Ordinance, as well as in the latest neighborhood plans for Twinbrook. We have supported higher levels of density in our town center for more than 40 years, and in our metro performance areas for more than 25 years.

The 2009-2011 Growth Policy attempts to address the issue of how to direct resources towards infill areas, in order to take advantage of existing infrastructure. Some of the proposed changes are consistent with the approaches that Rockville has adopted, such as permitting a higher level of automobile traffic in areas served by rail transit than in areas not served by rail.

Commissioners expressed two major concerns: on the general question of absorbing the level of growth anticipated and, in particular with school overcrowding. Staff therefore recommends that the City should provide a letter of testimony that focuses on the following issues:

- The City supports those concepts of the Montgomery County Growth Policy that recognize the County's increasing urbanization, and also supports refining policies so that they encourage mixed-use, transit-oriented development – rather than present obstacles to it.
- There is concern that the County is allowing higher densities abutting both the northern (Gaithersburg West Sector Plan) and southern (White Flint Sector Plan) boundaries of Rockville without adequate funding sources to mitigate the impacts of these densities.
- There is widespread concern with the continuing levels of school overcrowding; and increasing the threshold for fees appears to conflict with the broad citizen support for maintaining Montgomery County's nationally recognized school system.

In addition staff considers that these critical County-wide issues deserve greater exploration and discussion, and does not see that the Growth Policy – or indeed individual Sector Plans – provide the appropriate density phasing schedules to balance the proposed densities and their associated impacts.

Next Steps

The City has recently provided testimony to the Montgomery County Council on the Gaithersburg West and White Flint Sector Plans, and staff suggests that the Planning Commission recommend to the Mayor and Council that a letter of testimony outlining the City's continuing concerns should be sent to County Council President Phil Andrews in advance of any decisions that the County Council might make. As noted above, a Draft Letter is attached for your review.

Attachment: Draft letter from Mayor Hoffman to County Council President Phil Andrews